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ABSTRACT

A guide to consulting in higher education designed for consultants and college personnel interested in engaging consultants is provided. It is based on principles distilled from actual consultation experiences in college settings. In 1980, the Association of American Colleges (AAC) began a consulting service for member organizations (Project Lodestar, which led to their Consultation Assistance Service that identifies well-qualified consultants for AAC member institutions). Each of the two sections, designed for institutional personnel contemplating an external consultation and for prospective consultants themselves, contains 10 principles drawn from the Lodestar evaluation studies. In section one, they include asking why a consultant is needed, defining what the consultation is supposed to do, noting the most appropriate consultation format, selecting consultants carefully, and ensuring administrative support. In section two, they include knowing the institutions prior to going on campus, knowing who the client is, clarifying expectations, respecting the institution's statement of the problem, and encouraging broad faculty involvement. The most successful cases followed all of the principles, and the least successful ones followed few or none of them. Institutions have the right to expect the consultants to be objective and sensitive to their character. Consultants have the right to expect institutions to be open about their goals and role expectations. Contains 13 references. (SM)

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JON F. WERGIN

CONSULTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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CONSULTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PRINCIPLES FOR INSTITUTIONS AND CONSULTANTS

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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES, 1989

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FOREWORD

American higher education is characterized by keen competition but also by a high degree of cooperativeness. This apparent paradox is illustrated by the extensive use of consultants. The typical higher education consultant is based on one campus and helps a competing institution become more effective. The net result is the reverse of Gresham's Law: good practice drives out bad, and the total enterprise of higher education benefits.

This handbook is intended to help colleges and universities make wise choices about consultants and derive the maximum benefit from them. It draws extensively from experiences of the Consultation and Advisory Service that the Association of American Colleges established in 1980 with generous funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

While the financial support from the Mellon Foundation has expired, AAC continues to offer a modified Consultation Assistance Service. CAS provides assistance to AAC-member institutions by identifying well-qualified consultants in areas in which AAC has had extensive experience, including:

☐ Strengthening general education
☐ Strengthening and assessing learning in arts and sciences majors
☐ Incorporating new scholarship on women into the curriculum
☐ Integrating liberal and professional education (AAC staff members have particularly strong connections in the areas of engineering and business)
☐ Preparing liberal arts majors for teaching
☐ Internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum
☐ Improving critical thinking and writing across the curriculum
☐ Developing curricula addressing philanthropy and voluntarism
☐ Increasing transfer from two-year to four-year institutions

The preparation of this handbook has involved the work of many. Jon Wergin, associate director of the Center for Educational Development and Faculty Resources at Virginia Commonwealth University, wrote the text. The book reflects throughout the observations of Jane Spalding, who directed the Mellon-funded Consultation and Advisory Service and continues as director of the modified service. Sherry Levy-Reiner, Lauran Nohe, Karen Poremski, and David Stearman of the AAC publications staff shepherded the manuscript through to production. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation provided financial support. It is a pleasure to thank all those who helped make possible this practical and useful guide to choosing and effectively using consultants in colleges and universities.

—JOHN W. CHANDLER
President
Association of American Colleges

MAKING THE MOST OF A CONSULTATION

This guide to consulting in higher education is both for consultants and for college personnel interested in engaging their services. The use of consultants in higher education has grown enormously in the past twenty years. Pilon and Bergquist point to several factors contributing to this growth: increased external pressure for change, fewer resources available for full-time staff, increased state and federal regulations, and "politicization" of the faculty.*

While the need for consultants is increasingly recognized, employing a consultant is often more difficult on a college campus than in other kinds of organizations. The consultation's mission or goals may be unclear or conflicting; control over policy is often diffuse; and the institution itself may appear to be little more than a collection of federated communities. Thus, the use of consultants in colleges is a particularly delicate enterprise, requiring careful planning, judicious selection, clearly stated expectations, and broad institutional commitment to following through on the consultation. Consultants themselves also face a delicate task: in a short amount of time they are expected to size up the situation, establish credibility, and offer appropriate assistance, while remaining flexible and responsive to new information.

Despite these special needs and circumstances, empirically grounded

*All works cited are listed in the last section of this book, page 37.

literature on consultation in higher education is sparse, and implications for practice are few. Our purpose is to help fill this void by sharing guiding principles distilled from actual consultation experiences in a variety of college settings. Our goal is to help consumers and providers of consulting services make the most of their work together.

PROJECT LODESTAR

In 1980 the Association of American Colleges (AAC), with grant support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, inaugurated a consulting service for member institutions. The initial three-year program, Project Lodestar, provided funds to member colleges on a matching basis to bring onto campuses teams of consultants who would help resolve problems related to curricular or management issues. (Project Lodestar has evolved over the years into AAC's current Consultation Assistance Service, a program which, free of charge, identifies well-qualified consultants for AAC-member institutions.) Consultation projects typically lasted for one academic year. AAC appointed a "lead consultant" to head the team and then worked with the lead consultant and the institution to recruit two to five other team members. The guidelines suggested here emerged from immediate and longitudinal analyses of these consultation experiences.

From 1980 to 1983, twenty-six institutions participated in Project Lodestar. Fifteen were four-year, baccalaureate colleges; six were comprehensive state or urban universities; four were research universities; and one was a two-year community college. Campus issues were equally diverse. Roughly half were curricular issues: developing or changing core requirements for general education, integrating computer technology, evaluating new academic programs. Most other projects addressed governance or policy issues: long-range planning, evaluation of faculty, administrative organization, strategic marketing. Two projects dealt specifically with faculty development.

Each of the consultation projects was submitted to a thorough and rigorous evaluation. Consultants and campus participants were surveyed with written questionnaires and telephone interviews; project documents and reports from consultants and institutions were analyzed; and three years after each project ended, a follow-up study was conducted, combining surveys and interviews, to assess long-term outcomes and perceptions of consulting effectiveness. Brief case studies were then written for each project.

This handbook is divided into two parts, the first for institutional personnel contemplating an external

consultation, the second for prospective consultants themselves. Each contains ten principles drawn from the Lodestar evaluation studies. The method used was thus an inductive one, based upon empirical findings, rather than a deductive one based upon theory. Each of the twenty-six cases was examined for the degree of impact the consultation project had on the campus. In order to be included, each principle had to discriminate consistently between those projects which were most and least effective. The most successful cases followed *all* the principles; the least successful followed few or none of them. The result, therefore, is not a step-by-step handbook on how to approach consulting, but a set of guidelines that undergird practice.

Because these principles were derived from a wide range of institutions, problems, and individual consulting styles, they should apply to most higher education settings. Moreover, the principles overlap with findings from other works on consulting, both within higher education (notably Pilon and Bergquist and Mathews) and elsewhere. References to these other works are cited in the narrative where appropriate.

In short, this book is intended as a companion piece to the existing literature on consulting, one that distills the rich experiences of Project Lodestar into a set of important lessons. If the participants in all twenty-six consulting projects were brought together and asked, "What are the key ingredients of a successful consultation?" what follows is what they would say.

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PRINCIPLES FOR INSTITUTIONS

Many books have been written on how organizations can use consultants successfully (for example, Blake and Mouton; Holtz; Lippitt and Lippitt; and Shein). College campuses have unique political and cultural characteristics, however, which pose special challenges. The following principles reflect these difficulties and suggest ways of preventing or overcoming them. Principles are arranged roughly in chronological order.

Principle 1. Ask: "Why do we think we need a consultant?"
It is crucial to define at the outset what a consultant can do for you that you cannot do for yourself. Successful AAC consultations dealt typically with one of two kinds of problems. The first was a longstanding, chronic problem of a size or complexity that had frustrated internal efforts at resolution, such as major curricular reform or development of long-range planning. In these cases Lodestar consultants were most helpful in focusing energy on campus, as these comments by college faculty members illustrate:

> "Lodestar provided the opportunity and time to assess what our academic program should look like. We don't get that opportunity very often."

From another institution:

> "The recommendations tended to be confirmatory; [the consultants] didn't point out what we didn't already know. But the pressure of the consultants gave the project seriousness, emphasis, and momentum."

The second kind of problem revolved around issues so controversial—such as academic reorganization or program evaluation—that outside

Success of the consultation will depend on how accurately the problem is identified and defined

assistance was needed to defuse the politics. At one college, for example, Lodestar consultants were called in to evaluate a controversial new writing program. As one campus observer noted, the team was able to serve a useful mediating role:

"Overall the effect was excellent. The consultants were patient, aware of the delicacy of the situation, and asked serious questions. They listened carefully to faculty and were able to consolidate what faculty said into a coherent set of recommendations. The team was able to show how the immediate issues reflected long-range problems. They pulled no punches, and their intellectual honesty helped defuse the political environment."

In contrast, when consultants were brought in to help justify and implement previously identified solutions, problems were likely to occur. Consultants brought in at this stage tended to be viewed as political tools of the administration, brought on campus to help push through unpopular policies. In one case, a consultation involving a master plan for academic retrenchment was successful only because the consultant was able to persuade the college president to rethink what the plan was supposed to accomplish and to facilitate more meaningful discussions with the faculty.

Mathews has suggested several useful questions to ask prior to making a decision on whether or not to engage a consultant:

☐ Do I honestly want an independent point of view, or do I want someone who will tell me what I want to hear?

☐ What kind of expertise is needed to solve the problem?

☐ Would the consultant work alone on the problem, work collaboratively with faculty and staff, or train staff to solve the problem themselves?

☐ What is keeping my own staff from solving the problem?

The answer to this last question should help in approaching the next principle.

Principle 2. Define what the consultation is supposed to accomplish and prepare accordingly.

Success of the consultation will depend on how accurately the problem is identified and defined. Often "problems" are hard to distinguish from "symptoms"—vague dissatisfactions with a general-education program or long-range planning, for example. Campus administrators often reported difficulties distinguishing problems from symptoms because they were "too close" to the situation. As one person said, "We needed fresh ideas; we needed to be challenged to think beyond the status quo."

One of the primary benefits of consultation, then, can be to help define the problem. Shein has referred to this form of consultation as "process consultation," which he characterizes this way: "The manager's real problem often is that he *does not know* what he is looking for, and, indeed, should not really be expected to know. All he knows is that something is not right. An important part of the consultation process is to help the manager or the organization define what the problem is, and only then decide what further kind of help is needed."

AAC consultants often adopted this role, explicitly or implicitly, and usually this was perceived as an unexpected benefit. Several institutions, for example, originally had sought help from content experts as sources of curriculum ideas, but later used them more as "process" experts to help arrive at politically acceptable revision strategies. In other cases, however, the focus of the project remained unclear. At one institution, for example, the consultant had worked out what was thought to be an acceptable definition of the problem, only to find, on the next visit, that the administrative sponsor wanted no such revision. In several other cases, principally those in which the proposal writer was either unavailable or not directly involved, campus committees had trouble determining what specifically the project was supposed to accomplish. If this discomfort manifested itself in dependence on the consultants to clarify the problem, and if the consultants refused—appropriately—to do so, a slow start and lack of early clarity seemed inevitable.

In short: Be clear about what you want consultants to do for you. Recognize that one of their most useful services could be to define the problem more precisely, but make that part of the initial understanding.

Principle 3. Determine the most appropriate consultation format. AAC currently offers consultation in two forms: a short-term study using a single consultant and a long-term study employing a team of consultants. The latter approach was used exclusively in Project Lodestar. It became clear, however, that a team approach was less appropriate in some institutions, particularly those in which the presenting problem was not well defined. As a consequence, AAC revised the procedure somewhat by having the lead consultant make at least the first campus visit alone. After the issues and problems had been clarified by the one consultant, that consultant would work with the institution and AAC to form a suitable consultant team. This strategy worked well and evolved into the current short-term/long-term option.

Accordingly, a rough rule of thumb to follow is that if the project is in its early stages of problem definition and clarification, then a short-term study using a "process consultation" approach will likely be most useful. If you are ready to move to the next stage of identifying alternative strategies and negotiating political compromises, then consider the long-term approach using one or more consultants, depending on the complexity of the problem.

The evaluation findings revealed how powerful the use of a consulting team could be. Aside from the obvious advantage of having a broad range of expertise available, the strongest advantage of this approach is that teams are more capable of providing a balanced and fair perspective on the problem(s) under study, and hence tend to have greater credibility on campus than individual consultants. Usually teams are chosen deliberately to reflect a range of views on the issues, and this spectrum of opinion tends to give more credence to their joint recommendations. In one case, for example, the team was able to clarify some very difficult governance issues by reading as a group the subtleties of differing points of view on campus. The lead consultant noted:

> "The team was very good at listening and drawing problems out, probing around and asking very good questions. One of the problems with the faculty was that they had convinced themselves that they couldn't settle the problems, even though they could articulate them beautifully. We were finally able to outline a process to help them think about ways to deal with their problems and concerns and make some very concrete suggestions to them."

Another advantage is that teams provide a broader range of consulting styles and are better able to balance straight talk with compromise. For example, one campus participant said, "Our consultants seemed to play 'good cop, bad cop' with us. As soon as one finished berating us for lack of progress, another would throw us a bone and tell us to hang in there." A third advantage is that team members, as a group, are better able to listen, ask questions, and probe issues than any one consultant is capable of alone. One person said, "The team approach protected a single consultant from bombardment."

In order for teams to work effectively, they must be more than simply a collection of capable individuals. They must complement one another's skills and share responsibility for making the consultation successful. One campus observer said, "This team had great chemistry.

They seemed to energize one another. Together they were able to solidify a problem and place things in a context that made sense for everybody."

Some projects did show little evidence of team behavior, however. Sometimes team members were hurriedly selected and prepared; they had no contact prior to their first campus visit, and they thus appeared to be acting on their own. Often a lack of coordination led to disorientation and frustration. The critical factor was the role taken by the project's lead consultant in organizing, preparing and guiding consultant teams, and integrating their work into a coherent whole. This is a skill that cannot be overemphasized and is related to the next principle.

Principle 4. Select consultants carefully.

Project Lodestar allowed a good deal of flexibility in the way in which consultants were used. Some served as experts in their respective academic disciplines, some as "process" consultants; others were used in a "management-consulting" capacity (for example, by helping administrators better define interinstitutional relationships). Such flexibility was commonly cited as a major strength. Consultants were most useful in helping institutions define their educational mission, helping faculty groups work more cohesively, and assisting with the development of a more coherent planning structure.

A major finding of the Lodestar evaluations was that consultants played a large part in setting the project's tone on campus. Projects served by the same lead consultant tended to evolve in similar ways though the institutions served were quite different. In addition, these projects tended to be qualitatively different from those served by other consultants. This finding was traced to the operating styles of the lead consultants. They had one of three dominant styles: directive ("You've said your problem is this, but you should be looking at that"), nondirective ("What are the options and their consequences?"), or collegial ("Let's all figure this out together").

The question is whether the style fits the institutional context. Each type tends to have a different set of benefits and costs. The directive style appears to be the most risky because it may foster hostility or dependence, but in some cases it may be necessary to jolt the administrator out of a sense of complacency. The nondirective style works well in the long run because it demands ownership of the project by participants, but it is often characterized by a slow start as participants work through their initial expectations of consultants as "experts." (This finding also has been re-

ported by Bergquist.) The collegial style is generally the most well received because it communicates caring and commitment, but it also may foster dependence and make project follow-through more difficult once the consultant has ended the relationship.

Those who write about consulting are fond of creating typologies. Pilon and Bergquist list no fewer than ten consulting styles. Any typology is of course an oversimplification of human behavior; the ideal is to find consultants who are able to alternate among these styles as the situation and the institutional context demand. Determining what mix of roles and abilities is likely to be most useful, therefore, is the first criterion to consider in selecting a consultant.

A second important criterion is to consider the kind of person who will be able to establish credibility early in the consulting relationship. "Credible" Lodestar consultants tended to present two characteristics. First, they were able to demonstrate that they had dealt successfully with similar problems before at other institutions. (Other studies—Wergin, for example—have shown that demonstrating content expertise early is a necessary requirement for an effective consultation, regardless of the nature of the problem or the role the consultant will play.) Second, credible consultants usually—but not always—had experience in similar institutions. Personnel in a small, private, church-supported college are more likely to view favorably consultants having similar roots, trusting that such people will appreciate and understand the unique circumstances facing their institution. Early trust and credibility help both the consultant(s) and campus participants begin the work with a minimum of formal preliminaries.

Thus, as consultant candidates are suggested, ask these questions:

☐ What experience does the prospective consultant have in institutions like ours?

☐ With what kinds of issues or problems does this person work the best?

☐ Is the candidate comfortable with ambiguity—for example, helping the institution analyze its problem—or does he or she want to be a content specialist with a well-defined agenda?

☐ Has this person been used in similar settings before?

☐ If so, how did it work out?

If a team consultancy is being considered, additional questions should be asked about the lead consultant relating particularly to organizational, team-building, project-management, and facilitative skills and how this person is likely to manage the project. As noted earlier, the lead consultant likely will have significant influence on the consultation's overall tone, and someone who tends to be quite directive may not be appro-

priate for a project requiring much consensus building among the faculty.

Principle 5. Clarify expectations for all involved.
Consultants appreciate not only background information from the college (catalogue, program descriptions, and so on) but also a better understanding of the role(s) they are expected to play. Failure to clarify expectations at the outset delays significant progress. Many of the Lodestar consultations were plagued by a slow start. While most projects eventually gained momentum, inertia proved difficult for some to overcome. As one institutional participant said, "It took us forever to get into the starting blocks." Consultants often complained that they did not have enough information about the institution prior to their first visit. This consultant's comment was typical: "The college did not send me much preparatory material; perhaps they had not decided what they wanted me to know and do." Another said, "I was prepared regarding my topic, but I didn't know much about where they were, what was expected of me, or how I could best contribute. A phone conversation between their vice president or committee chairperson and me before the visit would have aided preparation."

Think carefully in advance about what you want the consultant(s) to do. Resist the temptation to depend on them for leadership. In some Lodestar institutions, early meetings with consultants were characterized by a feeling of dependence on the part of institutional personnel. The message was, "Here's our problem, now tell us what to do about it." This agenda often seemed to conflict with that of the consultants, who usually interpreted their purpose as helping institutional personnel think through their problem carefully and helping them decide what to do and how to do it. Such an approach was most productive in the long run, but caused some frustration and wheel spinning in the beginning. One of the reasons for this, certainly, was that in many cases college personnel viewed early visits by consultants as the first steps in project planning, while the consultants themselves were often expecting the participants to have done more preparatory thinking and seemed to resent the implication that it was up to them to generate activity.

Consultants very often felt uneasy visiting a campus armed with little more than formal institutional plans and an informal briefing. As one consultant said, "I was asked to present information early in the day—before I knew enough about [the college] to know how much of my experience was germane. I vacil-

Project success was most often linked internally with perceived administrative commitment to the project as a joint administrative-faculty effort

lated between description and advice all day—and feel I therefore did neither in sufficient depth."

This sense of discomfort was at least partly responsible for the "inflexible" or "pushy" behavior criticized in some consultants. Not having a clear idea of what was expected of them, some consultants responded by giving advice too early. Those who resisted the temptation to propose immediate solutions, but chose instead to help the campus look at options, to guide discussion, and to guide analysis of consequences were ultimately most successful. Here are some illustrative comments from campus participants:

"We knew we had to develop a program that fit this particular institution, and our consultants served as sounding boards for our ideas. They did not push their own views and biases unduly, but offered helpful suggestions and alternatives and pointed out potential pitfalls. At a certain point the committee concluded that it was in a position to proceed on its own."

"[The consultants'] 'nondirectional' approach seemed finally more useful than some of us had thought initially. We'd expected them to do more: not make our decisions for us, but certainly to display before us what some options might be."

"We had expected a physician-patient sort of relationship: The consultant would come in, diagnose our problem, and give us a broad-spectrum antibiotic. It took us a while to take responsibility for ourselves. Now I'm glad we did."

Principle 6. Ensure administrative support.

During Lodestar, the most consistent determinant of eventual project success was administrative commitment. Projects characterized by slow starts and lack of direction were invariably in those institutions where top administrators (president or academic dean) either declined to play a visible role or seemed intent on using the project to implement unpopular decisions. In contrast, project success was most often linked internally with perceived administrative commitment to the project as a joint administrative-faculty effort.

Specific position titles seem not to matter very much. Rather, genuine administrative commitment has two characteristics (Holtz). First, the individual sponsoring the project on campus represents the interests of the institution, believes in the project, and wants to help carry it out. And second, the individual has decision-making authority. If the administrative sponsor delegates responsibility, delegation should be clear, and consultants should be given the oppor-

tunity to meet occasionally with the sponsors themselves. This consultant's observation captures well the importance of administrative support:

"The project's success is due mostly to the strong leadership of the dean. He is deft in his dealings with all of his constituencies and clearly is held in high esteem by both subordinates and superiors. The optimism with which the consultants view the future of [the college] stems in large measure from our appreciation of his vigor, conviction, and skill."

Strong and visible administrative support has been found to be the single most important factor leading to organizational change in higher education (Wergin, et al.). Mathews has suggested that effective administrative support has four components: a clear, written statement of project importance reaffirmed as necessary throughout the project; clear and specific communications to institutional participants about project goals, the roles and responsibilities of the consultant, and task deadlines; logistical support for consultant visits; and personal accessibility. Lack of perceived administrative commitment in some of the Lodestar consultations led to comments like these from institutional participants:

"I've wondered about the long-term success of this project at times. The president has seemed intent on staying out of the way."

"The notion of getting a top person to head [the project] may contradict the need to get someone who can give it full attention. Our dean was too busy."

"Our project committee on campus was given no charge [by administration]. The consultants were useful, and we worked well as a group, but we got little feedback from the top. As the year wore on our enthusiasm evaporated . . . Before I would get involved again, I would try to make sure that our administration really supports the project."

As the above quotations illustrate, administrative support is more than an important variable to the success of a consultation project; it is a *necessary condition*.

Principle 7. Ensure appropriate involvement of faculty.

Another important factor accounting for eventual project success or failure is the degree of faculty awareness of the project and the extent of faculty members' involvement in project activities. This is especially critical for institutions facing difficult political decisions. One institution, for example, needed to develop an academic plan for shrinking student enrollments. A faculty member at this in-

stitution voiced the importance of meaningful faculty participation: "Because of this project faculty members are more willing to take part. They feel listened-to now."

A good rule of thumb to follow is to provide for meaningful faculty involvement at all stages, particularly by those who will likely be most affected by project outcomes. An effective method is to use a campus committee of respected faculty members, handpicked to represent key disciplines and charged to carry out the study. Such a committee is most important for projects at the stage of generating and/or evaluating proposed changes, but can be very helpful for projects at the problem-definition stage as well.

Several criteria must be met in order for this committee to work effectively. First, the committee must have strong and visible administrative support, with clear boundaries set on their task (see Principle 6). Second, faculty representatives need to be campus leaders, capable of influencing their colleagues. Third, committee members must "own" the problem under study in two ways: by believing in the need for and merits of the project, including a willingness to invest their time to see it through; and by taking responsibility for the project's success, rather than merely seeing themselves as advisors to outside consultants, working only to plan for the next consultant visit.

Meaningful faculty involvement was seen by many as one of the most important ingredients of a project's eventual success. One dean said, "We worked hard to gain commitment from the Academic Affairs Committee to the original proposal. Faculty felt ownership right from the start." Another said, "[The project] was seen as a fresh approach by the faculty. They felt listened-to." Consultants also appreciated administrative efforts to mobilize the faculty community. This consultant's experience is illuminating:

> "[Top administrators] really didn't know what to do at first, so they spent most of the time talking to their faculty. This turned out to be exactly the right thing for them to do, because . . . the faculty developed great confidence [in their sincerity]. I was beginning to worry that we were missing our time line. But . . . all of that work began to pay off because things began to move very rapidly."

In contrast, one of the most common regrets expressed by campus administrators when asked to review completed consultations was that they had not involved faculty members soon enough, or meaningfully enough. One said, "We should have prepared more thoroughly for the work by formalizing a faculty plan-

ning group before the project. . . . We also should have made certain that all disciplines were represented at the planning meetings—[some disciplines] were notably absent." These perceptions often were mirrored by consultants. For example:

> "The faculty members were not adequately briefed about their role as active contributing participants. My sense was that many of the faculty members remained very much in the dark about the nature of the enterprise. They did not seem at all prepared for the part I seemed to be playing in the consultancy, and I think that some of them had not yet begun to take the consultancy seriously. It doubtless has to do with the politics that surrounded the project. Too many of the faculty members exhibited to me the feeling that I had been brought in to cudgel them into doing something they were quite opposed to doing, and a few of them even seemed surprised that I was willing to listen to their point of view at all."

In short, the importance of meaningful faculty involvement cannot be overstressed. The following scenario, observed at three different institutions, illustrates graphically how neglect of this principle can have disastrous consequences. The chief academic officer had been responsible for preparation of the consulting project and intended to use the consultancy as a way of pushing through major curricular reform. Little or no input was sought from faculty members most affected by the anticipated changes, and key people from internal committees were left off the ad hoc committee. These people concluded that the project was a sham and branded the consultants as administrative pawns. The consultants' disinterested image was severely damaged, as was the credibility of their recommendations. To make matters worse, the academic officer attempted to initiate change quickly, with little public discussion. The ensuing uproar left the consultants pessimistic about the project's ultimate success. The implications of this scenario are clear. Involvement of key faculty with interests potentially inimical to project goals could forestall political subversion later on.

Principle 8. During the consultation, take advantage of the "prestige factor" and the consultants' disinterested opinion.

On virtually every campus, the presence of consultants selected through AAC tended to elevate the importance of the issues under scrutiny and heighten their credibility. As one campus dean noted, "There was a 'prestige factor' in getting our proposal funded by a national organization. It gave our project greater

By taking specific problems and issues off the back burner, consultants serve as catalysts for campus action

legitimacy." Another said, "It was good getting recognition that our college is worth dealing with."

In this way, by taking specific problems and issues off the back burner (where, in some institutions, they may have been for several years), consultants serve as catalysts for campus action. As one college administrator said, "The project was a goad for concentrated and effective effort. It gave us an opportunity to step back, probe, and look at some hard realities." In one sense, external requirements—in the form of impending consultant visits or report deadlines—give the task at hand a certain immediacy. Simply knowing that consultants will visit the campus periodically constitutes an incentive for action and provides needed momentum. As one campus respondent said, "The project got us off dead center. The consultant's message was, 'This is a problem and you'd better address it.'" Someone in another institution noted that while progress had been slow, "getting *anything* going here in a year's time is miraculous. [The consultants] gave us the push we needed." Another administrator noted, "[The project] kept us focused on major issues, as opposed to details. It also kept us away from all of the historical refuse that had built up over the past several years."

Besides being catalysts for action, consultants are able to provide a disinterested, outside perspective. One person referred to this as the "visiting prophet factor." Consultants are generally seen as being free of vested interests, having nothing to gain or lose by their remarks. The usefulness of disinterested opinion may take different forms from campus to campus. At one institution the consultant spent much of his time on campus working with "renegade departments" opposed to curricular changes. Because he was an outsider, he was trusted more than inside staff would have been. In other cases, Lodestar consultants served as "lightning rods," absorbing criticism generated by controversial recommendations—criticism that might have otherwise been leveled at campus leaders. At one school, consultants found themselves in the middle of a highly politicized conflict over curricular revision, and at first their report only fueled the controversy. Later, most on campus agreed that the report led to an acknowledgment of the need for change. At another school, consultants helped faculty members interpret program evaluation data and made it more difficult to dismiss unfavorable data as "invalid."

A third product of the consultants' disinterested role is to help elevate debate. As one consultant observed,

> "Often campuses were reluctant to admit how silly their debates and

arguments had become, and they were embarrassed to let too much dirty linen hang out for outsiders (consultants) to view. I found occasions on which I could take advantage of the desire on the part of campus people to put on a slightly better front, and I could use those occasions to reinforce that behavior."

Finally, consultants can help reduce campus fear of change. An administrator at one institution said, "[The consultant] was very helpful in cutting through the maze of academic defense mechanisms and suggesting questions that would address hidden agendas." Another said, "By addressing faculty concerns with a wealth of experience and insight, [the consultant] was able to cut through fear of change and suspicion of planning."

Principle 9. Anticipate implications of evolving plans.
A consultation can have a number of impacts on campus, in addition to those directly identified in the project goals. There are several likely benefits. One is faculty or campus unification. During Lodestar this effect occurred in a variety of ways. At one college, where academic and degree programs had been highly compartmentalized, unification was across disciplines, which was especially significant given the faculty development thrust of the project. At another, unification was across campuses separated by as much as several hundred miles. And at a third, the project brought department chairs together to address matters of common concern for the first time in years, creating a "lobbying block." By thus facilitating new connections, a consultation may stimulate possibilities for a wide range of ripple effects. This aspect of the project also may be intensely personal. "Thank the creators of Lodestar," said one faculty member, "for allowing me to know my colleagues better!"

Consultation also may help draw needed administrative attention to an issue. At one institution that is highly oriented toward professional degree programs, Lodestar consultants helped the president "face up to the problems" in the arts and sciences. Another was in the middle of a major transition from "college" to "university" status; nearly all administrators were either new or "acting," and the author of the original Lodestar proposal left the school shortly after the project was to begin. Despite these barriers, consultants helped focus attention on the importance of modifying the general-education curriculum as part of the transition process. "The timing couldn't have been better," said the new dean. "We now have an opportunity for impact at the ground level."

Principle 10. Evaluate both the process and outcomes of the consultation. Systematic evaluations of consulting projects are rarely performed in higher education, except when mandated by some external funding source—and then the information collected tends to be more useful to the source than to the institution. This is unfortunate, as an evaluation can have several key benefits.

First and most obviously, feedback from the experience can promote important learning about management of future consultations. Second, feedback *to consultants* about the effectiveness of their work can help them become more effective in their future work with other institutions. A third benefit of evaluation is perhaps less obvious but also can be the most important. Conscious and deliberate reflection on the experience provides closure to the immediate project and helps guide implementation of its findings. Consider this remark made by a campus administrator in his report to AAC on the college's Lodestar consultation:

> "In reflecting on the project for this report I've slowly realized how far we've come with the consultants' help. We still have a long way to go, but I have a better idea now of what yet needs to be done."

The kind of feedback likely to be most helpful will vary by project and institution. The Lodestar findings suggest, however, that two general kinds of information will likely be most helpful: information about the effectiveness of the consultation *process*, and about the short- and long-range *outcomes* of the project.

Some useful process questions to ask:

☐ In hindsight, how well did we define the problem?
☐ Did problem definition change during the consultancy?
☐ If so, how?
☐ What was the consultant's role in this process?
☐ How well did we prepare ourselves, and the consultant(s), for the first campus visit?
☐ How clear were we on project tasks and responsibilities, particularly those to be borne by the consultant(s)?
☐ How receptive was the faculty to the project?
☐ How could faculty involvement and ownership be improved?
☐ How effectively was the time of the consultant(s) used on campus?
☐ How well did the operating style of the consultant(s) match our needs?
☐ What would we do differently next time?

Pilon and Bergquist have included sample survey forms for consultants and institutions; these may be helpful as models for collecting process data.

Some useful outcomes questions to ask:

☐ What did the consultant(s) do for us that we could not have done ourselves?
☐ What potential do consultant recommendations have for positive institutional change?
☐ What has to happen for such change to occur?
☐ How much institutional commitment to change exists, by both faculty and administration?
☐ Has an implementation plan been developed? Is it realistic and feasible?
☐ What political or economic factors are likely to influence implementation?
☐ Are appropriate campus resources available?
☐ How can we keep from lapsing back into ineffective behaviors?
☐ And finally, the payoff question: Were project benefits worth the cost?

Mathews has listed several different kinds of costs associated with consultancies: time spent by campus participants, consultant expenses, opportunity costs (resources diverted from other campus projects or problems), and costs to follow up and implement change. These data can be useful to judge the overall impact of the project, to set priorities for follow-up, and to suggest more realistic criteria to use when considering a future consultancy.

A corollary to this principle is to build in informal discussion with consultants and negotiate how the institution might receive feedback from consultants informally prior to the preparation of any formal reports. Such informal conversations have two advantages. First, it pays to have an idea of what formal reports will contain. The Lodestar project had several instances of reports containing perceptions or recommendations that were seen as inaccurate or inappropriate, thus hurting the credibility of the project on all sides. Second, informal feedback provides an opportunity for true dialogue, which can be infinitely more useful than the sterility of written prose.

There is no one best way to approach a consultation project on campus. The approach chosen will depend on the institutional context, the nature of the problem, and the fit between the institution and the consultant's own expertise and repertoire of process skills. The closest thing to a "recipe for success" is contained in the reflections of one of Lodestar's lead consultants, and it is worth quoting here in full:

"Among the ingredients are these: persistence on the part of the administration to see the new development through, but space enough for faculty to do it their way; a strong institutional tradition which sustains faculty commitment; the willingness of core faculty to envision what the merits of [the proj-

ect] might be, and the commitment to work on actualizing that vision; external consultants who work well together and click with the faculty; and a consultant who enjoys the project, likes the people, and works along with them in thinking through the next steps."

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PRINCIPLES FOR CONSULTANTS

Anyone who has ever served as a consultant on an unfamiliar campus knows how difficult it is. The consultant must somehow accomplish two things at once: establish credibility early as a resource and demonstrate flexibility regarding the institution's unique circumstances. This is an exceptionally difficult balance to strike because sometimes these purposes conflict. Too much attention to displaying expertise can be seen as "nonresponsive"; too much time spent listening can hurt credibility. Yet successful consultants manage to do both things well, and the following guidelines have been drawn from their experiences.

Principle 1. Know the institution before you go.
In other words, do your homework. On the other hand, being overprepared may make you—or make you appear—rigid once you are on campus. The key is not just to familiarize yourself with the background and purposes of the particular project on which you are consulting but to gain a sense of the nature of the institution itself: its mission, culture, heritage, and ways of doing things.

The first step toward accomplishing this is to ask some basic questions: How is the problem described and justified? What is the institution attempting to accomplish with the consultation, and why do they feel outside assistance is needed? How much progress has been made on the problem already? Am I being called upon to assist with problem definition, delineation of alternative strategies, or implementation of solutions? How appropriate do project goals appear, given the institutional context? These points may warrant clarification with the campus contact person.

Do your homework, learn about the institution's traditions and character, and stay open to new information

Other questions may include: Where does the institution fit in with other colleges in the area? How does it see itself as "unique"? What is its student market, and how is that changing? How are curricular and other policy decisions made? Who was involved in the development of the original proposal? What role will the proposal writer play in the project? How much publicity has the project received on campus? What is the level of perceived faculty support? Has a faculty committee been selected? How were members chosen? How does the institution plan to integrate its work with that of the consultants?

A second and perhaps concurrent step is to ask directly why *you* were selected as a consultant, and how college staff members feel you might be able to contribute.

Institutional staff can be highly sensitive to any suggestion that a consultant has paid insufficient attention to the college's "unique character," or that a consultant is unprepared to give the institution his or her full attention during the consultation. Note the following comments made by Lodestar participants about some of their consultants:

"The consultants didn't spend enough time with us to get a feel for our college."

"Not all consultants had enough background about us. Some came in with unreasonable expectations."

"At times the consultant seemed not fully informed . . . for example, at our first meeting he seemed unfamiliar with our proposal. Had he read it?"

"The consultants were unprepared for their visit. They did not seem to have familiarized themselves with the course syllabi, purposes of the program, relation to the curriculum, and [the college's] educational goals. They spent too little time on campus . . . and made superficial judgments based on their presuppositions."

Note, in contrast, these appreciative comments from others:

"I was most impressed by the consultants' sensitivity. They tried to understand what the needs were as we saw them—and as a result they got a firm grasp of what was going on."

"What I liked best about the consultant was his sensitivity to our school combined with a sensibility as to what was possible."

Integral to a display of sensitivity on the consultant's part is his or her ability and openness to continue learning about the school once on campus. People should not have a

sense that the consultant is simply confirming presuppositions that had been based upon written material. A consultant said this:

> "I welcomed the opportunity to witness the college at its routine business of making the decisions we were called in to comment upon. The faculty meeting . . . told me more about the faculty's sense of strength and purpose than all the documents that came in the mail, or all the 'assessments' that were otherwise provided."

Another wrote:

> "It was not until we actually visited campus that we learned something of the nature of the political problem that had developed during the course of the year. What emerged gradually. . . . was that it was the professional curricular faculty members who were backing change. . . . On the other hand, the humanities faculty as a group proved to be resistant to change and had strong arguments for why it could not be done. Moreover, this faculty had a make-up quite different from the other divisions."

To reiterate: do your homework, learn about the institution's traditions and character, and stay open to new information.

Principle 2. Know who the client is. It is important at the outset to determine whom you are working for, who exactly the *client* is—that is, who "owns" the problem on campus. This person is often—though not always—the proposal author or official campus contact person. The true client should have two characteristics (Holtz). First, he or she must represent the interests of the institution, believe in the value of the project, and demonstrate commitment to help carry it out. Second, the client is someone with real administrative authority—not, for example, a staff person in the academic dean's office. If the project is to be officially represented by someone else, be sure that you are given the opportunity to meet with the "true" client to confirm expectations and review progress.

There may at times be conflict between the client's interests and those of the institution. In such cases your only recourse is to address the conflict openly and tell the client the truth: that is, after all, why you are there. Here are two illustrative examples from Lodestar. At one college the author of the original proposal, the academic dean, appeared to be the only one firmly committed to the project's objectives. When the project began taking on a different focus, based to some extent on input from faculty members and other administrators, the Lodestar consultants

found themselves embroiled in problems from which the project never fully recovered. A similar problem occurred at another institution, where the proposal writer—a staff person in the central administration—did not like the direction the project was going and so carried negative messages about its progress to other campus administrators. While administrative support eventually held firm, it took active interceding by Lodestar consultants and the committee chair to ensure it.

In short, understand that your first loyalty as a consultant is to the client but understand also that your responsibility is to determine, communicate, and preserve the interests of the institution as you see them.

Principle 3. Clarify expectations for everyone.

Mathews provides a useful summary of points to address when defining expectations. All are strongly supported by the Lodestar data:

☐ Demonstrate understanding of the contextual issues and the immediate problem confronting the client.

☐ Specify what will be done, by whom, where, how, and within what time frame.

☐ Describe the nature of interim or final reports.

☐ Estimate the amount of time to be spent on the project.

These are all elements of a formal contract. Shein suggests, however, that equally important is the "psychological contract": what each party expects to gain from the consulting relationship. He recommends that consultants try to assess as early in the relationship as possible all expectations that may underlie the client's stated problem so that they do not become traps or sources of disappointment later.

The Lodestar evaluation showed that psychological contracts are of utmost importance in academic organizations. Becoming comfortable with your role as a consultant, therefore, is absolutely critical. The more you are able to discern the anticipated roles of project participants, how you will relate to other consultants (if applicable), and what the overt and covert agendas are for the consultation, the better.

First, gain a sense of the client's expectations for you, particularly as they parallel expectations for campus participants. Probe how you and campus committees are expected to work together. Be wary of any signal that consultants are expected to lead campus committees, at one extreme, or to endorse campus plans, at the other. Make sure, in other words, that project ownership rests with the institution, but also that the desire for constructive counsel is genuine. Define, as concretely as possible, the role you are asked to play. Is it to

help the institution define its problem, to help determine the best approach to solving the problem, or to help move the project along a path already chosen? What specific skills or areas of expertise are you expected to contribute, and how are they expected to complement those already available on campus? Is the institution looking more for content expertise (for example, are you expected to suggest elements of a core curriculum), or for facilitation skills (will you be expected to moderate discussions or negotiate compromises)?

Weigh this information carefully. See how it fits with what you feel you have to offer, and how it matches the needs of the institution as you perceive them. For example, do campus participants appear to grasp the practical details involved in the project, or are they trapped in an unrealistic, visionary scheme? Now is the time to express any reservations about planned strategies or anticipated roles. Negotiating differences at the beginning can only help clarify project objectives and tasks and help make the consulting visit(s) more efficient and productive (Shein). Note the frustration implicit in this consultant's reflections:

> "We had thought that the project was to be an examination of departmental review in a larger context. Everybody seemed to agree to that. But then when we went in for our initial set of interviews it was a bit shaky. We said, 'Here we are, who are we interviewing?' And they said, 'First of all we have to clarify what the project is.' And this was four months into it!"

Second, if the project involves a team consultation, determine in advance how team members are to work together. Good teams are more than collections of individual experts with complementary skills; Project Lodestar showed that successful teams are able to generate, compare, and synthesize good ideas; and to sense attitudes, problems, and opportunities at the institution quickly and accurately. These invariably are teams that have an opportunity to develop a good working relationship, characterized by a comfortable sense of relative roles, strengths, and personal operating styles. Thus, the more contact team members have with each other prior to the consultation, the better.

Principle 4. Respect the institution's statement of the problem, but treat it as a point of departure. This is a sensitive matter, and must be handled with great care. The issue is embedded in the nebulous concept of "institutional pride." Most Lodestar campus participants firmly held the belief that "we're special—our

problems are unique." In working with the institution's statement of the problem—and the range of solutions implied by the phrasing of the problem—consultants must be careful to understand the local values and assumptions behind it. Not to do so is to risk a response of "it may work at College X but it won't work here." At the same time, consultants must realize that one of the most useful services they may offer is that of challenging thinking gently by sharing their own external, disinterested perspectives. This comment from a faculty member captures how one consultant was able to strike that delicate balance:

> "[The consultant] saw to it, courteously but firmly, that we faced the key questions raised by our project; she challenged us to defend our basic concepts by her analytical probing of objectives and methods; she encouraged us in the belief that our project was worthwhile and that we were capable of carrying it out."

The key is to demonstrate a firm commitment to helping institutional participants develop their own solutions rather than attempting to solve their problems for them. During Project Lodestar, consultants were generally warmly received on campus; when they were not, the majority of complaints were of consultants "pushing their own agenda." In such cases, campus participants felt offended and resentful. One, for example, said, "[The consultant] was dictatorial and didn't listen. He just gave set speeches . . . and treated us in general like a 'poor little college.'" Another said, "[The consultant] aroused considerable hostility and insisted on his own ideas of what the project should be. Our greatest difficulty has lain in forcing him to work with the project as we see it."

In several other cases, consultants focused exclusively on their own areas of expertise (for example, admissions, marketing, computers), suggesting at least by implication that campus participants should assimilate the information on their own. They did not. As one campus leader observed pointedly, "I guess we just didn't ask the right questions."

Successful consultations, on the other hand, were characterized by reactions like the following:

> "[The consultant] was just right for us. His skill in relating to faculty concerns, his political sense and mastery of committee dynamics, his street wisdom in compromise, and his ability to define long-term advantages to those who risked short-term losses put everything together. He was an amazing and indispensable catalyst."

In short, do not arrive on campus assuming that what you are prepared

to do will necessarily be appropriate. Do not "push your own agenda," and do not assume responsibility for solving the problem.

Principle 5. Encourage broad faculty involvement; recognize and anticipate the politics.

In retrospect, participants at Lodestar institutions appreciated the consultants' role in helping to promote a broader base of faculty input and participation. In some institutions, this broader faculty participation was critical to a project's success; in others it simply generated more widespread campus enthusiasm for the project.

There are, however, important political considerations that transcend the obvious advantages of enlarging faculty participation. As virtually any consultation potentially affects campus policy, so it is likely to have political implications. Mathews has described two competing theories of political processes in institutions of higher education. The first, propounded by Baldridge, portrays colleges and universities as hotbeds of political conflict, with "authorities" (administrators) and "partisans" (rival factions of interested faculty, staff, or students) locked in a struggle for control and influence. Key decisions thus tend to reflect either the interests of the most powerful group or compromises among equally powerful groups.

March, in contrast, characterizes colleges and universities as "organized anarchies" having ambiguous goals, diffuse responsibilities, and unpredictable participation by the institution's members. Decisions are made only as a function of individual persistence or external deadlines.

Examples of both Baldridge's and March's models were found among the institutions participating in Lodestar. Among institutions behaving like organized political systems, certain campus factions were quite active with respect to the problem under study and tended to view consultants as additional political actors, sometimes perceiving them as threats to their power bases. Among institutions behaving more like organized anarchies, however, commitment to working on the issue was often difficult to achieve.

Either way, the consultant faces a difficult challenge. Early in the process, therefore, ask yourself these questions: How is the institutional need recognized on campus? Who shares it? How visible and controversial is it? Where is the locus of power and interest related to the issue under study? Which individuals or groups stand to gain by accomplishment of project goals? Which stand to lose? What is the level of administrative commitment to solving the problem? In particular, what is the likely political gain for the "client,"

and how might this be viewed by other interest groups?

Sometimes political conflicts may make consensus on project objectives difficult or impossible to achieve, yet common ground can be found in certain strategies. For example, one Lodestar project originally was designed to implement a major curricular revision. Consultants soon discovered strong resistance to the plan on the part of certain campus factions, and after much negotiation the project was redesigned to use the consultants as evaluators of a pilot phase. By addressing issues of concern to all sides, consultants were able to maintain their neutrality and protect their image as disinterested outsiders. In the end, their report was widely regarded as balanced and fair, and the revision was ultimately implemented.

Consultants may be called upon to play other political roles. Examples include helping administrators articulate governance issues and formulate strategies for faculty participation, playing an intermediary role among campus factions ("shuttle diplomacy," as one participant called it), mediating with college administrators when project support seems uncertain, and representing the views and concerns of faculty members who feel threatened by change.

From all of these activities emerges a common theme: A sensitive consultant with no vested interests in the institution can help defuse the political environment.

Principle 6. Recognize and exploit the relative merits of "process" and "content" consultation.
This point cannot be overemphasized. During Lodestar, the most commonly cited project strength was the "facilitative" or "catalytic" role played by consultants. Time and again, campus participants reflected on the value of consultants' skills in helping them to focus on important issues and find their own solutions. This held true even when initial college expectations were for consultants to play a more "expert" role by providing advice and counsel on immediate, content-oriented questions (for example, "What should we teach in an introductory course on the arts?"). As one administrator said, "We most appreciated the Socratic style of the consultant team. They drew out our comments and encouraged us to build on our own resources. They knew when to listen and when to give advice."

The relative merits of "process" versus "content" consulting have been discussed at length in many other writings on the subject (Shein, Blake and Mouton, Lippitt and Lippitt, Pilon and Bergquist, Mathews). Pilon and Bergquist, for example, note that content experts often "start

with two strikes against them"—that university faculty and administrators often are distrustful of those who "offer instant solutions," "say nothing new," or are unsuccessful in practicing what they preach. Mathews suggests that while the most successful consultants play both roles well, "process" skills are most important in college settings: "Administrators are usually trained as researchers and scholars. . . . [Thus] they tend to be reluctant to accept any advice on face value, even if it comes from experts. Most want to know why a particular recommendation is the most appropriate for a given situation, and they look to consultants to be 'master teachers' as well as subject experts. . . . [Secondly,] consultants are frequently expected to achieve consensus on very complex and politically sensitive issues. Many administrators have found that consensus is easier through an outsider who can provide an objective analysis of the issues."

The following quotes from Lodestar participants illustrate this point well.

"I think it is difficult, no matter how sharp and well-intentioned the consultants, to transfer procedures from the context of one institutional system to another, partly because the procedures don't fit the situation and partly, probably, because of built-in resistance to change."

"The consultants were expert at drawing us out and encouraging us to come up with a better understanding of our problem and the possible solutions. They were careful not to hold out this or that solution as the best."

"Among the consultants who visited our campus, the strongest ones solidified the problem and placed issues in context; the weakest just made speeches."

"Our consultant was superb in asking the right questions: people would get stuck, then he would ask enough questions in the right style to get things moving."

Without question, Lodestar consultants were used far more often for their process skills than for their content expertise. But the latter can be critical as well. Most commonly, content expertise will take the form of information on how other institutions have handled similar problems and issues successfully. Examples of timely professional advice include models for program planning or review, guidance on serving academically underprepared students, interpreting evaluation data, using microcomputers in instruction, developing general education requirements in the humanities, and so forth.

Remember that consultants continually walk a fine line between pro-

Make it a point to learn how change occurs at the institution

viding timely counsel and making suggestions seen as impertinent or irrelevant. The point—and the difficulty—is avoiding prescriptions and withholding advice until campus participants own the problem and take responsibility.

Principle 7. Communicate interest and caring, but confront the issues. This principle can be dealt with briefly, because the point is straightforward. The issue is one of trust. Greatest success was noted in the Lodestar projects in which consultants were seen as interested, supportive, and caring, yet politically astute and willing to confront issues directly when necessary. At one institution, for example, consultants were commissioned to do an evaluation of a program so controversial that many on campus expected the project to be part of an administrative whitewash. By skillfully mixing a genuine interest in the college and what happened to it with plenty of "straight talk" about where the political minefields were, however, the lead consultant engendered the trust he needed. As a campus administrator there observed, "I admire [the consultant's] determination, perspicacity, openmindedness, and courage."

"Courageous" was, in fact, a common perception held of successful consultants. For example, one campus observer noted, "One consultant in particular made all the difference. He was able to stand up to [a disciplinary group of faculty] and help them see a way out of the dilemma so that their academic interest was served and was intellectually legitimate." The message, in essence, is this:

- ☐ Be supportive.
- ☐ Tell the truth.
- ☐ Be willing to take calculated risks.

Principle 8. Use your influence to obtain commitment for task accomplishment. One of the most common findings of Project Lodestar was the "spotlight" effect of consultant visits. Simply knowing that consultants were due to arrive served to focus and stimulate action on campus—and at least temporarily, Lodestar issues took priority. At some institutions, campus activity was sustained throughout the year; at others there was a flurry of activity just before a consultant's visits but little was done at other times. "Nothing," said one consultant, "absolutely *nothing* was done on the project until I was scheduled for a visit. Many of the committee's minutes were dated the day before my arrival!"

An appropriate role for consultants, therefore, regardless of the nature of the problem addressed or the consultation style chosen, is to work with the institution to set achievable short- and long-term goals and identify specific tasks to be accomplished

and realistic timelines. Process consultation is fine, and you can expect some meandering and open-ended discussion early; but the consultation ultimately will be successful only if campus participants experience a sense of task accomplishment. As one faculty participant said, "The consultant helped push us to do what we needed to do—to plan in a concrete and innovative manner. Her presence added a tone of objectivity and an extra measure of accountability to the process."

Try, then, to build and sustain a sense of project momentum. Your role as consultant is to help keep the project spotlight burning, even when you are not on campus.

Principle 9. Be patient. Do not expect too much too soon.
It is possible, of course, to be *too* task-oriented, particularly if your view of what is achievable does not match the client's. Consider this comment from a contact person at one of the Lodestar institutions:

> "Strangely, the consultants were least helpful in their negative view of how we were meeting the time line . . . The consultant leader's time frame seemed to be at odds with the planning phase of the project . . . We still believe that this additional planning was pedagogically sound."

Or this comment from another institution:

> "[The consultant] was a good motivator and kept things moving, but he seemed so disappointed in the progress we were making that he gave the proceedings a bad tone . . . He does not seem to appreciate the difficulties raised by the fact that we are a multi-campus, public university."

This principle reinforces the earlier one about demonstrating respect for an institution's unique circumstances. Make it a point to learn how change occurs at the institution and how campus participants view what is possible. If project goals seem grandiose or idealistic, help to pare them back and encourage specificity. Encourage the institution to set benchmarks for progress. If the project falls behind schedule, renegotiate the goals. This is, after all, not the only problem with which the institution is grappling, and unforeseen circumstances can change priorities quickly. One of the most important things you can do is to help build in project success, even if accomplishments are small. As one consultant said, "I believe they think that we all accomplished more than *I* think we did, and that's a good sign." The Lodestar experience demonstrates how a consultation can have latent or catalytic effects that in turn generate signifi-

cant progress long after the consultation has ended. Try to encourage and nurture small successes. They are, after all, better than large failures.

Principle 10. Build in informal discussion and follow-up with the institution.

It is important to recognize that formal, official, end-of-project reports are not always the most efficacious method of stimulating change. Research in other settings on the use of "expert" information (for example, Patton) demonstrates that informal feedback and oral reports are often more powerful influences on behavior. The same was true of Project Lodestar. Campus participants, when asked how the consultation was most influential at their school, responded much more often with "personal contact" and "group facilitation" than with any reference to formal reports. Most of the time, formal reports were used to confirm and summarize earlier discussions.

Be sure that written reports contain no surprises. Validate your observations with campus representatives, or have them react to early drafts. In some cases, conclusions drawn by Lodestar consultants were disputed by participating colleges as "misperceptions." Such reactions can significantly threaten your credibility; communicating inferences informally and modifying them as necessary prior to the release of any public document can help alleviate this problem.

Encourage closure through informal follow-up. Respondents at most Lodestar institutions expressed some disappointment that consultants were not able to spend more time with them. Usually this was, in effect, a compliment. But in some cases the consultation ended without a clear direction being given for facilitating the details of consultants' recommendations. It is important, therefore, to help the institution clearly delineate post-consultation project phases and responsibilities.

Six rules for resolving international conflict from the ultimate pragmatist, Henry Kissinger (cited in Fowler), also serve the college consultant well:

- ☐ Be better prepared than anyone else. If you are pushed to go beyond your data, stop.
- ☐ Model strength.
- ☐ Move at a functional pace. Work at the group's speed, but look for chances to make leaps.
- ☐ Be social. This is a way of modeling strength.
- ☐ Always know what you expect and what they expect.
- ☐ Set reasonable expectations and work for unexpected outcomes.

CONCLUSION

People often subscribe to what might be called the "Red Adair model" of consultation. Adair, the expert on oil well fires, is called in whenever local efforts to put out a fire do not work or when the fire is of such magnitude that it requires more than local resources. To be sure, there are occasions when this type of consultant is appropriate in higher education—for example, when the institution faces an enrollment or financial crisis that threatens its survival. The immediate and tangible gratification that comes from putting out a "fire," moreover, is a feeling that many consultants secretly long for or envy in others.

Resolving an immediate crisis usually has only short-term effects, however; problems that started the fire often remain. In contrast, consultants who are able to help institutions with long-term solutions have the most lasting impact, even if their work seems less dramatic in the short run.

It is this alternative model of consultation that has been fostered by the Association of American Colleges. Perhaps the best way to review the principles for consultants and institutions is to summarize what each side is justified in expecting from their work together.

Institutions have a right to expect that consultants will:

☐ Be objective and approach institutional problems with an open mind rather than being unduly influenced by pat solutions.
☐ Be sensitive to the institution's unique character.
☐ Support good ideas, yet challenge thinking through creative approaches and fresh perspectives.
☐ Maintain their integrity and that of the institution throughout the consultation.

Consultants have a right to expect that institutions will:
☐ Define the problem with reasonable specificity, including relevant conditions and circumstances.
☐ Be open about their goals and not expect the consultant to guess the hidden agendas.
☐ Be clear about role expectations for consultants and maintain ownership of the project.
☐ Ensure administrative commitment and appropriate involvement by the faculty.

AAC's consulting service is designed to help member institutions work through long-term strategies for critical campus problems. By paying close attention to the principles in this volume, both consultants and institutions can help avoid unproductive experiences, and keep good experiences from being accidental.

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